The Impact of Accessible Political Knowledge on Voters' Candidate Evaluations, Issue Positions, and Issue Consistency

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines whether the levels of political knowledge and the cognitive accessibility of that knowledge have an impact on the way citizens make political evaluations. In particular, I examine whether the accessibility of knowledge – that is, those respondents who have a certain facility with political information – arrive at their judgments differently than those who have low knowledge and for whom it is inaccessible. The analysis in this paper focuses on the accessibility of partisan identification and political knowledge and the role these play in how individuals evaluate the president. In particular, I examine whether a greater facility with political knowledge differentiates between citizens in how much they rely on partisan identification when they evaluate the president's job performance and when they state their issue positions. Though partisanship is often viewed as a crutch for citizens who are less well-informed about politics, I argue that those who are better able to use political information are also better able to use partisanship in their evaluations of the president and in choosing their issue positions. In addition to the usefulness of partisanship and ideology, I examine whether facility with political knowledge is related to consistency of opinions on issues with similar questions.

PROBLEMATIC CAPACITY OF CITIZENS

A continuing issue in the study of political behavior and psychology is how citizens think about politics and choose between political alternatives. These issues are important to the study of democracy and citizenship. Much of what we know about the political capacity of individuals comes from surveys and survey research, where respondents are asked to make judgments regarding issues or candidates similar to the kinds of judgments they might make at the ballot box. A great deal of research has therefore focused on just how capable citizens actually are, what variables explain capacity, and how individuals are able to function in the political world if they are less capable.

Though Converse was not the first person to note individuals' response instability or to question individuals' capacity for citizenship, his 1964 article on mass belief systems has inspired a large body of research aimed at explaining how citizens, especially ill-equipped citizens, are able to make political decisions (e.g. Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, Rahn 1993). In the search for what individual characteristics differentiate people in their capacity for citizenship, there has been a great deal of focus on political knowledge and the circumstances under which knowledge matters (Price and Zaller, 1993). A related body of literature is concerned with how those with less political information arrive at political decisions when they are faced with uncertainty, and in particular, what kinds of heuristics they use to make judgments (Kahneman and Tversky 1973; Tversky and Kahneman 1974). In the world of politics where complex issues or conflicting values might be at play and people do not have the time or energy to devote to optimizing their political decisions, political parties are useful tools in helping even those with minimal levels of knowledge reach political decisions (Downs 1957, Key 1966).

In general, researchers assume that a "theory-driven" strategy based on character traits or partisan stereotypes requires less cognitive effort than a "data-driven" strategy based on more specific considerations such as policy information (e.g. Rahn 1993; Stroh 1995; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991). Partisanship is a theory-driven cue considered to be a fairly reliable shortcut in the absence of more specific policy information, even if it is imperfect (Rahn 1993). Reliance on such shortcuts is assumed to be greater for those with less education or less political knowledge, as the data-driven strategy is assumed to require more cognitive effort for this group of people than for those with more education and more political knowledge (Stroh, 1995).

Though some view reliance on shortcuts as being overly maligned as a "mere crutch" for the less-capable citizens a few researchers do consider reliance on heuristics or theory-driven strategies to be an important variable in explaining capacity for citizenship (see Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991). Others are equivocal on whether reliance on heuristic devices like partisanship is a positive or negative thing (e.g. Huckfeldt et al, 1999). Though there may be

disagreement on the normative implications of relying on different heuristics to make political choices, the literature on partisan identification and ideology indicates that stronger partisans and those most able to think in ideological terms are better able to refer to consistent principles when they have to make political decisions.

ACCESSIBILITY IN POLITICS AND THE SURVEY RESPONSE

Accessible information is distinguished by its position within long-term memory; it is accessible because it is easily available within individual cognitive structures and hence is readily retrieved (Fazio 2000). The longer it takes to retrieve the information, the less accessible it is presumed to be, and the more effort is required to make use of that information. Since response latency is a measure of the time it takes to go through the mental operations involved in answering a survey question, it is seen as an indicator of the mental effort that a respondent uses to arrive at and report an answer (Bassili 2000).

Because question-answering problems can arise from difficulties at the interpretation, retrieval, judgment, or response stage of the survey response process (Tourangeau 1984), response latency is thought to provide a broad picture of the processing demands of a question. The more accessible the information or attitude is in memory, the less effort and therefore less time is required to use and report that information. The less accessible something is, the more effort is required for these mental operations. Thus the time it takes to report a survey response is related to how the various constituent bits of information are integrated and the "readiness" with which that information can be retrieved from memory (Bassili 1996). If the object-evaluation link is not strong enough to elicit an immediately accessible attitude or piece of information, then the individual engages in extra cognitive work to arrive at an answer.

Thus the response latency for political knowledge items are an indicator of how much cognitive effort is required to recall these facts about the political environment. It is likely that a respondent who has difficulty with political knowledge (especially if the knowledge level being

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tested is low) will also have low levels of relevant political information for the kinds of questions typically found in a survey of politics. Such a person would also likely have difficulty integrating those bits of information to arrive at a political judgment. One can imagine that if a respondent has difficulty identifying which party is more conservative, that person would also have trouble effectively using the concept of partisanship when making political choices, whether at the ballot box or to a survey question. Thus response latency to political knowledge can be another dimension of political expertise.

Response latency has provided political scientists with a practical means of exploring the cognitive processes that underlie political behavior. It has generated important and reliable insights into issues such as judgments of presidential performance (Miller and Krosnick 2000), the role of party identification (Huckfeldt, Levine, Morgan and Sprague 1999), and the different dimensions of attitude strength (Bizer and Krosnick 2001, Krosnick and Petty 1993). In general, accessibility can distinguish between individuals on measures commonly used to evaluate capacity for citizenship and can describe the cognitive structures people use to think about politics. Despite the different questions it is used to address, the results of research that uses this measure are consistent with each other as accessibility is related to political sophistication across all of these studies. Thus it is reasonable to consider response latency to knowledge questions this way as well.

The concept of accessibility has been applied to models of the survey response process for surveys on political topics and other subjective questions. Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinksi (2000) propose a belief-sampling model where considerations (feelings, beliefs or knowledge about an issue) are sampled at a rate proportional to their accessibility in memory. The considerations a respondent retrieves depend on their accessibility at the moment the survey question is asked. Accessibility may be affected by any number of either short- or long-term things, such as previous survey content (Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988, Tourangeau, Rasinski, Bradburn and D'Andrade, 1989, Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000), recent experiences (e.g.

Zaller and Feldman 1992, Feldman 1995) or long-term accessibility, attitude strength, or attitude extremity (Bassili 1995, Bizer and Krosnick 2001, Fazio 2000, Huckfeldt et al 1998, 1999, 2000). The belief sampling model is very similar to the survey response model proposed by Zaller and Feldman (1992) (see also Zaller 1992 and Feldman 1995).

Though the terminology differs somewhat, both models focus on response instability in attitude surveys. Tourangeau and his colleagues concentrate on how retrieval and judgment processes affect response instability and focus on context effects in surveys. Zaller and Feldman focus on political learning and opinion formation and the implications of the survey response process for the nonattitudes thesis in political research. However both models start from the assumption that when respondents are asked an attitude question, they retrieve a sample of considerations to make a judgment and report an answer. The most accessible considerations receive the most weight in the sampling process.

Huckfeldt et al (1999) examine this hypothesis that more accessible heuristics are more useful in political decision making. They argue that "readily accessible points of political orientation provide useful heuristic devices for navigating through unfamiliar political waters (p. 891)." If accessibility indicates strength of association in memory and more accessible considerations have a greater impact on attitudes than less accessible considerations, then the more accessible a person's partisan or ideological identification, the more important that identification will be in forming a political opinion.

Huckfeldt, et al (1999) do indeed find that partisanship and ideology are more useful constructs to citizens for whom these constructs are more accessible. That is, the more accessible the construct, the more able the individual is to use that information when making an evaluation of political figures. Accessibility becomes an important element in explaining political capacity. In this paper, I build on the findings by Huckfeldt et al (1999) by exploring not just how the accessibility of a particular construct impacts political evaluations, but also the impact of accessible political knowledge on political thinking.

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I focus on political knowledge as an indicator of capacity for citizenship, where the more sophisticated are able to better use information from the political environment to translate their predispositions into specific opinion statements about policies and candidates. Political knowledge has been shown to be an important explanatory variable predicting political behavior (e.g. voting, activism) and political psychology (e.g. reliance on shortcuts, persuadability, and political learning). Zaller (1992) demonstrates that the interaction between political awareness and political predispositions is fundamental to the process by which citizens use information from their political environment to form opinions. The low level of political knowledge in the American electorate has been well documented (Converse 1964, 1975; Zaller 1992, Zaller and Feldman 1992, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993) and higher levels of knowledge appear to differentiate citizens on a number of characteristics that are deemed important to citizenship.

Thus it makes sense to examine how knowledge and the accessibility of knowledge are related to the considerations individuals use to form political opinions. I expect that the more accessible political knowledge is, the more able individuals are to use relevant political considerations. What this paper considers is not just how much people know, but also how well they know it. That is, the cognitive accessibility of political knowledge can be considered another dimension of expertise. Previous literature on accessibility has usually measured the response latency for a particular construct to assess directly the impact of that construct on judgments. In this paper, I am focusing on the accessibility of knowledge as an indicator of a more general ability to use information effectively. In particular, I expect to find that the more sophisticated make greater use of partisanship in their evaluations of President Bush and in their judgments on political issues. However I also expect that the more sophisticated make greater use of ideology as an additional, more difficult consideration.

Another way to examine the impact of knowledge accessibility on political thinking is to look at issue consistency. Huckfeldt et al (1999) examine the impact of partisan accessibility on issue consistency. I replicate their model and add knowledge accessibility to the equation. Using

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survey questions that touch on similar policy areas allows an examination of how consistent respondents are in a single policy domain in one survey.

METHOD / EXPECTATIONS / MEASUREMENTS

The data for this analysis come from the Badger Poll, a public opinion survey conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. The Badger Poll is a statewide RDD of Wisconsin adults. The survey was conducted on five separate occasions during 2004, with a goal of 500 completed interviews at each administration of the poll. Data from the five polls are pooled together. The Badger Poll is primarily a public opinion survey with questions about national and Wisconsin politics and culture (see appendix for question text). However occasional administrations of the poll include questions for external clients. The polls in April and June of 2004 both included twenty two questions about stroke symptoms for the Wisconsin Stroke Alert. The interview length is between 15 and 25 minutes. The field period for interviewing approximately 500 respondents is five to ten days (see Table 1).

Political Knowledge. Political knowledge is measured as the number of correct answers to three questions (following Huckfeldt et al, 1999). The items used here began as three questions from the American National Election Studies, adapted for the Wisconsin context, namely:

1. In your judgment, which party is more conservative, the Republicans or the Democrats?
2. And which party currently has a majority in the Wisconsin legislature?
3. What political office is currently held by Dick Cheney?

These three items are a direct test of knowledge as an indicator of awareness; they capture active learning from the current political environment. However they are also a minimal test of awareness and do not require considerable political expertise in order to respond correctly.

Table 2 shows the percent of respondents who answered each of the individual knowledge items correctly. The levels of knowledge are fairly stable across polls; however there

are slight differences around the October poll. This poll was administered October 23-27, 2004, six days before the national and state election was held on November 2, 2004. This is consistent with prior work demonstrating that campaign environments activate citizens' political considerations and make them more accessible (Grant et al 1999; Mulligan et al 2003; Huckfeldt et al 1998 and 2000). These differences are substantively small. The time required to answer all three questions is also fairly stable across polls, but is slightly shorter for the October poll than it is for polls earlier in the year prior to the start of the presidential race.

Similarly, there are no differences across polls in mean knowledge levels except for the October poll, where mean level of knowledge is slightly higher than the average across the remaining polls (table not shown, $t=2.29$, $P=.01$). Thus a few days prior to an election, when the environment is rich with political information and people's predispositions are activated, they are also more aware of political information across the board. This can be attributed to the impact of campaigns in activating political information processing.

The accessibility of political knowledge does seem to be related to other variables commonly used as indicators of political capacity. Respondents were asked if they were certain to vote, if it makes a difference who is elected to the presidency (an indicator of efficacy), and if they pay attention to politics. All three of these variables exhibit differences by knowledge level, and two of these questions exhibit differences by knowledge accessibility (using two tailed t-tests, see Table 3), while the item on whether it makes a lot of difference who is elected president does not vary by accessibility of knowledge. Those who are certain they will vote, believe it makes a difference how is elected, and who pay attention to the candidates have higher levels of political knowledge. Those who are certain to vote and who pay attention to the candidate also have that knowledge more accessible in their minds. In other words, there is tentative evidence to suggest that response time to knowledge – that is how well you know what you know – can be an important independent variable in evaluating how citizens think about politics.

Candidate Evaluations. The Badger Polls asked respondents to rate the job George W.

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Bush is doing as President. The response options for this item are excellent, good, fair, or poor. Besides this overall evaluation of the president, respondents were also asked to rate the job George W. Bush is doing in separate policy domains, namely handling domestic problems, the economy, foreign policy, terrorism, and the situation in Iraq. Though these domain-specific questions use the same response scale as the general question, it is nonetheless possible that respondents use different judgment processes to arrive at more general versus more specific evaluations.

Issue Positions. Since the bits of information and the cognitive processes used to arrive at issue positions are possibly different than those used for candidate evaluations, it is useful to examine these hypotheses using issue positions as the dependent variables. There is one item on the issue of race and three items on the issue of gay marriage available in this dataset. These questions all have dichotomous response options – either "favor or oppose" or "approve or disapprove." The question text for these items is as follows:

- "Would you favor or oppose a law making it illegal to take someone's race into account -- either for or against them -- in making hiring decisions?"
- "Do you approve or disapprove of laws allowing homosexual people to marry members of their own sex?"
- "There is a proposed constitutional amendment in Wisconsin which defines marriage as being between one man and one woman and which bans so-called civil unions between members of the same sex. Do you favor or oppose this state constitutional amendment?"
- "How about an amendment that said nothing about civil unions but defined marriage as being between one man and one woman?"

One of these issues, namely the question on using race in hiring decisions, is not an issue that received any serious amount of press coverage during the field period of these polls. However the three questions relating to gay marriage and civil unions were very current events during the field periods for these polls. In addition to these questions, there is also a series of questions asking opinions on Iraq. The response options for these items differ somewhat, as some are dichotomous and some are continuous. The question text for these four items is as follows:

- "Do you think the United States did the right thing in threatening war if Saddam Hussein refuses to give up any weapons of mass destruction he may have?"

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- "Although the UN had passed many resolutions demanding that Iraq disarm, the US was not able to get a final resolution explicitly calling for war. Do you support or oppose the decision of the US and other countries to use force anyway?"
- "In the long run, will the US decision to attack Iraq increase the risk of terrorism in the world, reduce it, or not make that much difference one way or the other?"
- "Would you call the US led war in Iraq a complete success, mostly a success, only partly a success, mostly a failure, or a complete failure?"

Issue Consistency. Respondents rate President Bush's job approval on three policy areas: the economy, terrorism, and Iraq. Later they are also read a series of positive evaluation statements about various candidate attributes in those policy areas and are asked to describe if the statement applies to George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither. Consistency would be indicated by a positive correlation between rating George W. Bush positively on the job approval items and by attributing the positive evaluation statements either to him alone or both to him and Kerry.[1] I begin examining consistency by looking at the correlation between positive (or negative) job approval and evaluation statements for those with more and less accessible political knowledge. Looking at Table 4, the correlations for those with higher knowledge accessibility are greater than for those with lower accessibility, providing initial evidence that response time to knowledge should be related to issue consistency.

Response Timers. There is a latent timer in the computer-assisted instrument that is attached to every question in the interview. This timer measures the elapsed time between the answers to two consecutive questions in seconds (regardless of any skip patterns). In the analysis, I use response time as a continuous variable. The timer starts when a question first comes on the interviewer's screen and stops when the interviewer enters the respondent's response. A number of procedural details need to be addressed about the timers.

First, the latent timer is a somewhat noisy measure in that it also contains the time required for the interviewer to read the question to the respondent (Mulligan et al, 2003; Bassili 2000). Nonetheless, latent timers have been used successfully as a measure of response latency,

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[1] Consistency is also counted if a respondent rates the president negatively, and attributes the positive statement to John Kerry or neither candidate, but not to George W. Bush.

especially when response latency is included as an independent variable. Mulligan and his colleagues (2003) compare the use of latent timers with active timers where interviewers actively set a timer when they finish reading a question and stop the timer when the respondent provides a response. The authors find that latent and active timers produce similar results. Active timers are more precise and provide more statistical power. However they are considerably more expensive to collect in that they require additional hardware, software, and interviewer training.

Besides cost, one additional advantage of the latent timer is that it is transparent both to the interviewer and the respondent and thereby less prone to data loss due to error. Deviations from the typical interviewer-respondent interaction result in latencies that are "contaminated" by respondent questions, hesitations, or "trigger happy" interviewers (Bassili 2000). This can result in a loss of latency data for between 11% of the cases (Bassili and Scott 1996) to over 30% of cases (Bassili and Fletcher 1991).[2] Moreover, this loss of data is likely not random – it may be interviewer dependent or may be systematically related to respondent characteristics that are of interest in a study of cognitive processing. Thus latent timers provide a reasonably objective measure of response latency.

Secondly, interviewers occasionally erase valid timings by jumping back to an earlier question at the respondent's request. In these instances, the times are artificially low due to the interviewer's action in returning to the original point in the interview.[3] Where I was able to recover the original valid timing, I recoded the time for those cases. I was able to do this using the keystroke logs from each interview. The keystroke logs are time stamped so that the time between question items and interviewer keystrokes can be recovered in most instances. Where I was unable to do so and the timing was too short to allow a question to be read (one second or less), the timer was set to missing. This is the same procedure used by Huckfeldt and his

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[2] Using voice-key technology to measure response latencies results in an even greater loss of data. Bassili and Fletcher (1991) had to invalidate 50% of their cases.
[3] Interviewers return to the last point in the interview by hitting the "Enter" key repeatedly very quickly. The original valid timing is then rewritten by this invalid timing.

colleagues (1998, 1999 and 2000). Third, the distribution of response times is typically highly skewed, thus I log all response times before including them in analysis. I also follow the convention of setting latencies more than three standard deviations above the mean to missing (Mulligan et al 2003; Grant et al 1999; Huckfeldt et al 1998, 1999 and 2000; Bassili and Krosnick 2000). This results in a loss of 47 (or 1.8%) cases.

Respondent and Interviewer Baseline. It is also necessary to control for respondent baseline speed and interviewer speed. Respondents verbalize responses to questions at different baseline rates. Some respondents might generally speak more quickly than others, so it is important to take individual differences into account when assessing the relationship between knowledge and attitudinal latencies. In order to control for differences between respondents in their baseline speed of response, I constructed a baseline measure from fourteen latent timers at the end of the survey. While Huckfeldt et al (1999) also use a latent timer to construct a baseline speed, they include items more representative of political speed, such as the speed for interest in the campaign and for contact by a party organization. The timers I use are not based on any political items (which may confound the baseline with other variables of interest in this paper, namely the political speed of response) but are based only on demographic questions.

Respondent cases are assigned to interviewers at random. In order to control for systematic differences between interviewers in the speed at which they read and code questions, I calculate the mean interview time for each interviewer on each poll. By controlling for both respondent and interviewer baselines, it is possible to control for factors other than response latency that could "contaminate" the latent timers as measures of response time.

RESULTS

President's Job Evaluation

I begin looking at the results for the accessibility of party identification and political knowledge on overall evaluations of the president's job ratings (Table 5). Consistent with my

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expectations and to results from previous work (Mulligan et al 2003, Huckfeldt et al, 1999), longer response times to partisan identification make the effect of partisanship more pronounced. First, partisanship has the expected effect; Republicans give the president higher approval ratings. Second, the interaction term for partisanship and the speed of partisanship has the opposite sign. That is, the longer people need to think about their partisan identification, the less of an impact their identification has on presidential job approval. The faster their identification comes to mind, the more consistent their approval is with their identification. However the magnitude of this effect is substantively small, at about 1 percent (0.018 / 1.576 = 0.011). The magnitude of this effect is considerably smaller than in Huckfeldt et al (1999), where the impact of accessibility increases the effect of partisanship by 40 percent.[4]

Knowledge accessibility, on the other hand, has a much greater impact on the effect of partisanship than the accessibility of partisanship by a magnitude of 12. The accessibility of political knowledge increases the importance of partisanship in the overall evaluation of the president by 14 percent. This suggests that it is those who are best able to use even general information from the political environment (as measured by the three knowledge questions on the Badger Poll) that make greater use of partisan identification.

If we look at the differences between those for whom knowledge is less accessible versus those for whom knowledge is more accessible, we see similar results. Partisanship has a larger coefficient for faster respondents than for slower respondents. Ideology, considered to be a more difficult construct, also has a larger coefficient for faster respondents. Looking at the relative size of the coefficients we see that the ratio of the coefficients for ideology and partisanship is also greater for faster respondents (0.38 versus 0.22 for slower respondents). To Converse (1964), a greater reliance on ideology is an indicator of "constraint" and political sophistication. Thus

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[4] This difference in magnitude may be due to the different units of measurement. I use response time in seconds from latent timers; Huckfeldt et al have response time in hundredths of seconds from interviewer-keyed timings. Mulligan et al's (2003) comparison of latent and keyed timings suggests that the unit of measurement may have an impact on magnitude of effects.

those who have a greater facility with political knowledge are better able to make use of information (even general, heuristic information) such as partisanship. Though partisanship is often considered a shortcut, it is a useful one and not necessarily a "mere crutch."

Finally, the interaction between partisanship and speed of partisanship is significant only for those who have more accessible knowledge (third column, Table 5) – again, suggesting that it is those who have greater facility with political knowledge that can make greater use of partisanship in their evaluations of the president.

When looking at the president's job approval in separate policy areas (Table 6), the relationships between the variables are not as consistent and there is no clear pattern across policy areas. The equations for ratings of foreign policy and the economy are entirely consistent with the results above. Accessibility of knowledge increases the impact of partisanship on foreign policy evaluations by 16 percent, and it increases the impact on economy evaluations by 13 percent. However knowledge accessibility has no impact on evaluations of the president on handling domestic problems, terrorism, or the situation in Iraq. If I look at foreign issues (foreign policy, Iraq, terrorism) versus domestic issues (domestic problem, the economy) there is still no clear pattern. Knowledge level has an impact on evaluations of domestic policy, the economy, and terrorism, however this effect seems independent from the effect of the accessibility of knowledge. My hypothesis for why knowledge accessibility matter for the overall evaluation and not as consistently for the domain-specific evaluations is that the overall evaluation is a summary of policy or domain specific opinions. Since it is a summary that encompasses many more considerations, it is precisely where accessibility of information should matter the most.

Issue Positions

When looking at respondent positions on various issues and using those issue positions as the dependent variable, we see very similar results (Tables 7a and 7b). The four equations in Table 7a all have a dichotomous dependent variable (favor or oppose). The three equations relating to gay marriage or civil unions – a current event that received press coverage during the

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field period for these polls – all show consistent results, namely that knowledge accessibility increases the impact of partisanship on approval of gay marriage, approval of a state constitutional amendment to ban civil unions, and approval of a state amendment to ban gay marriage. The issue of passing a law that would make it illegal to take race into account in hiring decisions is not consistent with my hypotheses or with any of the other results. This equation shows partisan identification, knowledge level, and knowledge accessibility to be significant, but knowledge accessibility does not have an impact on partisanship. It is possible that the level of knowledge measured by the questions I use is too low to differentiate between individuals on an issue that was not a current event in the news.

For the marriage issue, Republicans are less likely to approve of gay marriage and more likely to favor a state constitutional amendment on civil unions and on gay marriage. The interaction term for partisanship and knowledge accessibility is both significant and in the opposite sign, indicating that those who need more time to respond to basic political knowledge questions make less use of partisanship than those who answer quickly. The relative impact of the interaction term is 26 percent for approval of gay marriage and for favoring an amendment on civil unions, and 30 percent for favoring an amendment on gay marriage. The interaction term for partisanship and partisan accessibility is not significant.

One other noteworthy finding here is that interviewer speed is significant for the item on a state amendment on civil unions though not for any of the other items (nor for the items on presidential job evaluations). It is not clear why interviewer speed is so important for this item. However this question is difficult in that it is double-barreled. It asks about defining marriage as being between one man and one woman, and it also asks about banning civil unions. It is possible that for questions that are particularly difficult to answer, the interviewer's pace matters a great deal more to the kind of answer a respondent provides.

Looking at the issues of the war in Iraq (Table 7b), the results are similar. Knowledge accessibility matters in three of the four equations, and it does so more than the accessibility of

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partisanship. For the questions asking if the United States did the right thing in threatening war, the impact of knowledge accessibility is 16 percent. For the questions asking about supporting the use of force without a resolution by the United Nations, knowledge accessibility has an impact of 26 percent. Finally, for the question asking if the war in Iraq will increase terrorism in the world, the impact of knowledge accessibility is 16 percent. Knowledge accessibility has no impact on the item asking whether the war in Iraq was a success, however the accessibility of partisanship has a small but significant impact; the accessibility of partisanship increases the impact of partisanship by 3 percent.

Again, interviewer speed is important for only one item, namely the question asking if the United States did the right thing in threatening war if Saddam Hussein refused to give up any weapons of mass destruction he may have had. This item is also double barreled in that there are assumptions implied in the question about Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction that the respondent may agree or disagree with separately from the questions of whether the United States did the right thing in threatening war. Once more, I believe that interviewer speed may have a great impact when the difficulty of answering a question is high.

Issue Consistency

For consistency between issues (Table 8), it appears that neither knowledge level nor knowledge speed explain consistency as it is measured here. The only significant variables are level of attention paid to the presidential candidates and ideology. Greater level of attention to the candidates results in more consistent responses. Ideology is also significant for consistency on terrorism and on Iraq where the more conservative respondents are more consistent in their responses. On terrorism, the coefficient for ideology is nearly as large as that for attention paid to candidates; on Iraq, ideology has more than 3 times the impact as attention paid to the candidates. This indicates that for these issues, conservatives have more consistent beliefs than respondents who identify as moderates or liberals. The latter appear to have considerable ambivalence resulting in inconsistent responses.

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CONCLUSION

Zaller (1992, pp26-28) is skeptical that most individuals use partisanship or ideology effectively since it is questionable whether or not citizens are able to use these constructs when forming political judgments. Response latency for political knowledge provides some perspective on this question. The three items I used to measure knowledge are very basic questions and are a minimal test of awareness of the political environment. Yet there is variation among individuals in how much effort they require to recall this knowledge. Furthermore, these differences explain how well individuals are able to use constructs such as partisanship when they make judgments or report attitude statements. Though party affiliation is often considered a shortcut for making judgments, it does not appear to be merely a crutch for the less sophisticated. That is, the more proficient a person is with political information, the more they rely on partisanship in their judgments. This is consistent with Zaller's (1992) receive-accept-sample (RAS) model of opinion formation, where greater exposure and receipt of political information from elites would lead to greater consistency between an individual's opinions and those of the elites. Since partisan affiliation is an important way in which elites communicate to the public, party identification should have a larger impact for those who are more politically aware.

The normative implications are ambiguous. On the one hand, this may indicate that those who are more politically aware are also less reflective in their judgments and are more dogmatic or single-minded in their use of partisanship at the expense of other more specific considerations. However I do not believe this to be the case. Partisanship is a more general consideration than policy specific information; however it is still a reliable indicator of the issue positions of elites and the party label conveys a great deal of information. That partisanship plays a greater role in evaluations of the president or in issue positions for those with a greater facility with knowledge suggests to me that people are better able to use that information to make judgments.

While knowledge accessibility explains president evaluations and issue positions, it does not explain consistency. Since the level of political knowledge is also not related to consistency

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as I expected, this may be because I do not have an adequate measure of consistency. However partisanship is related to consistency in predictable ways. This suggests that it is not necessarily the consistency measure that is at fault. Since the sets of questions used to measure consistency occur at different points in the interview, it is possible that the questions occurring in between those items have a greater impact on subsequent evaluations of the president than does respondent ability.

Response latency has provided political scientists with a practical means of exploring the cognitive processes that underlie political behavior. It has generated important and reliable insights into issues such as judgments of presidential performance, the role of party identification, and different dimensions of attitude strength. In general, accessibility can distinguish between individuals on measures commonly used to evaluate capacity for citizenship and can describe the cognitive structures people use to think about politics. This paper attempts to make a contribution to this body of literature. Despite the different questions response latency is used to address, the results of research that uses this measure are consistent with each other as accessibility is related to political sophistication across all of these studies. Thus it is reasonable to consider response latency to knowledge questions this way as well.

Table 1: Badger Polls, by date

Badger Poll Date	N Interviews	AAPOR Response Rate 3
March 2004	500	40.3%
April 2004	511	36.1%
June 2004	505	36.3%
September 2004	509	35.9%
October 2004	557	37.7%
Total	2582	

Table 2: Percent identifying correct response and mean time (in seconds) for knowledge items by field period

Poll Date	Identify conservative party[a]	Identify majority party in WI legislature	Identify political office held by Cheney[b]	Mean speed for 3 knowledge items [c]
March 2004	67.8%	76.5%	89.7%	28.4
April 2004	65.3%	72.3%	90.9%	28.8
June 2004	69.9%	73.3%	90.6%	27.8
September 2004	71.0%	71.4%	92.2%	28.2
October 2004	69.8%	72.3%	93.8%	27.4
Total (N=2582)	68.8%	73.1%	91.6%	28.1

a: Differences significant between April and September polls, t=1.72, P<0.05
b. Differences significant between October and March polls (t=2.22, P<0.01), between October and April polls (t=1.64, P<0.05), and between October and June polls (t=1.76, P<0.05)
c. Differences significant between October and March polls (t=1.83, P<0.05), and between October and April polls (t=2.43, P<0.01)

Table 3: Mean knowledge level and response time by intent to vote, efficacy, and attention to politics

		Mean response time	Mean knowledge level
Intend to Vote	Certainly will vote	3.217 secs	2.06
	Not certain or will not vote	3.310 secs	1.32
	Difference	-0.093***	1.921***
Efficacy	Makes a lot of difference who is elected	3.246 secs	1.961
	Makes some, a little, or no difference	3.265 secs	1.698
	Difference	-0.019	0.263***
Attention to candidates	Pays a lot of attention to candidates	3.223 secs	2.225
	Pay some, a little or no attention	3.286 secs	1.583
	Difference	-0.064***	0.642***

Table 4: Correlation coefficients between items on similar issues

Consistency (correlations) for issue areas	All respondents	Less accessible knowledge (slower Rs)	More accessible knowledge (faster Rs)	Less knowledge (0 or 1 correct)	More knowledge (2 or 3 correct)
Economy	0.681 (N=2251)	0.652 (N=1196)	0.712 (N=1263)	0.592 (N=873)	0.709 (N=1678)
Terrorism	0.257 (N=2519)	0.255 (N=1183)	0.266 (N=1245)	0.160 (N=859)	0.305 (N=1660)
Iraq	0.706 (N=2508)	0.693 (N=1172)	0.718 (N=1248)	0.597 (N=850)	0.751 (N=1658)

Table 5: Impact of knowledge accessibility on usefulness of partisanship in President's job ratings

	Job ratings of George W. Bush		
	All Respondents	Less accessible knowledge (slower Rs)	More accessible knowledge (faster Rs)
Party ID	-1.576***	-0.778***	-0.943***
Party ID Speed	-0.010	-0.016	-0.009
Party ID * Party ID Speed	0.018*	0.016	0.023*
Ideology	-0.269***	-0.173***	-0.357***
Knowledge	-0.013	-0.046	0.026
Knowledge Speed	-0.234*	---	---
Party ID * Knowledge Speed	0.222**	---	---
Baseline Speed	-1.427	-0.587	-3.253
Interviewer Speed	-0.750	-0.238	-1.886
Baseline * Interviewer Speed	0.443	0.166	1.042
_constant	7.004	4.645	9.753
N	1530	733	797
F statistic (P-value)	124.37 (0.000)	51.35 (0.000)	110.39 (0.000)
Adj R-squared	0.447	0.355	0.524

* $P<0.05$; ** $P<0.01$; *** $P<0.001$
OLS regression. Dependent variable is President's job ratings, coded 1=excellent, 2=good, 3=fair, 4=poor. Party ID is coded 0=Democrat, 1=Independent, 2=Republican; Ideology is coded 0=liberal, 1=moderate, 2=conservative.

Table 6: Impact of knowledge accessibility on usefulness of partisanship in President's policy-specific job ratings

	Job ratings of George W. Bush in separate policy areas				
	Foreign policy	Domestic problems	Economy	Terrorism	Iraq
Party ID	-1.289***	-0.986***	-1.143***	-0.996***	-1.069***
Party ID Speed	0.001	-0.003	-0.001	-0.012	-0.008
Party ID * Party ID Speed	0.009	0015*	0.009	0.013	0.017*
Ideology	-0.313***	-0.240***	-0.247***	-0.246***	-0.290***
Knowledge	0.020	-0.049*	-0.093***	-0.091***	-0.016
Knowledge Speed	-0.307*	-0.136	-0.184	-0.200	-0.099
Party ID * Knowledge Speed	0.203*	0.097	0.150*	0.099	0.088
Baseline Speed	-2.124	-0.633	-1.642	-1.137	-0.510
Interviewer Speed	-1.130	-0.195	-0.932	-0.486	-0.032
Baseline * Interviewer Speed	0.634	0.154	0.499	0.370	0.154
_constant	8.612*	5.260	7.753	5.706	4.346
N	1134	1138	1538	1532	1535
F statistic (P-value)	64.54 (0.000)	63.85 (0.000)	104.87 (0.000)	75.50 (0.000)	87.92 (0.000)
Adj R-squared	0.359	0.356	0.403	0.327	0.362

* P<0.05; ** P<0.01; *** P<0.001
OLS regression. Dependent variable is President's job approval in separate policy areas, coded 1=excellent, 2=good, 3=fair, 4=poor.
Party ID is coded 0=Democrat, 1=Independent, 2=Republican; Ideology is coded 0=liberal, 1=moderate, 2=conservative.

Table 7a: Impact of knowledge accessibility on usefulness of partisanship on issue positions

	Issue Positions			
	Favor ban on race in hiring decisions	Approval of gay marriage	Favor WI civil union amendment	Favor WI gay marriage amendment
Party ID	1.662*	-4.068***	4.008***	3.091***
Party ID Speed	0.024	-0.053	0.031	-0.050
Party ID * Party ID Speed	-0.017	0.039	-0.032	0.024
Ideology	0.092	-0.489***	0.391***	0.389***
Knowledge	0.194*	0.081	-0.307***	-0.185*
Knowledge Speed	1.078**	-1.286**	1.201**	0.998**
Party ID * Knowledge Speed	-0.432	1.056***	-1.046**	-0.938***
Baseline Speed	2.593	6.025	-17.429	-10.292
Interviewer Speed	1.008	3.624	-12.290*	-6.226
Baseline * Interviewer Speed	-0.996	-2.010	5.717	3.295
_constant	-6.233	-5.965	33.364	16.754
N	371	352	351	351
Log-likelihood (P-value)	-240.32 (0.014)	-179.98 (0.000)	-199.11 (0.000)	-196.69 (0.000)
Pseudo R-squared	0.044	0.174	0.163	0.117

* P<0.05; ** P<0.01; *** P<0.001
Probit. Dependent variable is approval of policies, coded 0=against or oppose, and 1=favor or approve. Party ID is coded 0=Democrat, 1=Independent, 2=Republican. Ideology is coded as 0=liberal, 1=moderate, 2=conservative.

Table 7b: Impact of knowledge accessibility on usefulness of partisanship on issue positions

	Issue Positions			
	Iraq 1 (Probit)	Iraq 2 (Probit)	Iraq 3 (OLS)	Iraq 4 (OLS)
	Right thing in Iraq	Support use of force	Iraq war increase terrorism	War in Iraq a success
Party ID	1.992***	2.474***	-1.287***	1.053***
Party ID Speed	0.029	0.039**	-0.011	0.033***
Party ID * Party ID Speed	-0.015	-0.038***	0.017**	-0.031***
Knowledge	-0.057	-0.089**	-0.042*	-0.020
Knowledge Speed	0.236	0.424**	-0.273***	0.023
Party ID * Knowledge Speed	-0.324**	-0.397***	0.211***	-0.071
Baseline Speed	-3.638	-0.606	0.044	-0.560
Interviewer Speed	-2.389*	-0.636	0.259	-0.207
Baseline * Interviewer Speed	1.176*	0.218	-0.017	0.160
_constant	6.072	-0.333	-1.541	1.833
N	1967	1963	2007	2053
Log-likelihood or F-statistic (P-value)	-1044.74 (0.000)	-1046.01 (0.000)	63.59 (0.000)	75.46
Pseudo R-squared or Adjusted R-squared	0.188	0.213	0.219	0.246

* P<0.05; ** P<0.01; *** P<0.001
Columns Iraq1 and Iraq2 are probit models, where the dependent variable is coded 0=wrong thing or oppose use of force and 1=right thing or support use of force. Columns Iraq3 and Iraq4 are OLS models. The dependent variable is coded as 0=decrease terrorism, 1=no difference, 2=increase terrorism and 0=complete failure, 1=mostly a failure, 2=partly a success, 3=mostly a success, 4=a complete success. Party ID is coded 0=Democrat, 1=Independent, 2=Republican.

Table 8: Issue Consistency

	Consistency on the Economy	Consistency on Terrorism	Consistency on Iraq
Attention to Candidates	0.206***	0.164***	0.090*
Party ID	-0.361	0.283	0.799
Party ID Speed	-0001	-0.007	-0.003
Party ID * Party ID Speed	0.004	0.006	-0.006
Ideology	0.044	0.156**	0.319***
Knowledge	-0.031	-0.050	-0.034
Knowledge Speed	-0.262	-0.046	0.078
Party ID * Knowledge Speed	-0.002	-0.021	0.009
Baseline Speed	2.953	-1.321	-2.559
Interviewer Speed	1.363	-1.046	-1.915
Baseline * Interviewer Speed	-0.839	0.427	0.792
_constant	-3.123	3.667	4.315
N	1524	1517	1516
Log likelihood	-660.56	-694.24	-796.85
Pseudo R-squared	0.053	0.047	0.225

* P<0.05; ** P<0.01; *** P<0.001
Probit. Dependent variable is consistency, where 0=not consistent, 1=consistent. Party ID is coded 0=Democrat, 1=Independent, 2=Republican. Ideology is coded as 0=liberal, 1=moderate, 2=conservative. Attention to candidates is coded as 0=none at all, 1=only a little, 2=some, 4=a lot

Appendix – Text of Selected Questions

Job Approval
- How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing as President? Excellent, good, fair or poor?
- How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing handling foreign policy? Excellent, good, fair or poor?
- How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing dealing with problems here at home?
- Handling the economy?
- Dealing with terrorism?
- Dealing with Iraq?

Attention, Efficacy, Voting
- Up to now, how much attention have you paid to the candidates running for President in 2004? A lot, some, only a little, or none at all?
- When it comes right down to it, how much difference do you think it makes who gets elected President this year. A lot, some, only a little, or none at all?
- Would you say it is absolutely certain you will vote in the upcoming election on November 2, that you probably will vote, you probably won't vote, or definitely will not vote?
- (vote01, vote27)

Ideology and Partisanship
- Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?
- In politics, would you consider yourself a liberal, moderate, or conservative?

Additional Political Evaluations
- I'm going to read you a brief series of phrases. For each, please tell me if you think it accurately describes George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?
    - "Has been unfairly attacking his opponent"
    - "Understands the problems ordinary people face"
    - "Can be counted on to keep campaign promises"
    - "Has a consistent record on the issues"
    - "Will protect the United States from terrorism"
    - "Will improve the US economy"
    - "Will deal well with the federal budget"
    - "Will protect the environment"
    - "Will make the US respected in the world"

- I'm going to read you a list of people in public life. For each of them, please tell me if you have a favorable impression of them, an unfavorable impression, or don't know enough to make up your mind.
    - George W. Bush
    - Russ Feingold
    - Herb Kohl
    - John Kerry

Political Knowledge
- In your judgment, which party is more conservative, the Republicans or the Democrats?
- And which party currently has a majority in the Wisconsin legislature?
- What political office is currently held by Dick Cheney?

Demographic Items – Baseline Speed Calculations
- Compared to other places to live and work in this country, would you say Wisconsin is one of the very best, better than most, about average, worst than most, or one of the very worst places to live and work?
- How many years have you lived in Wisconsin?
- How many years have you lived in your community?
- Finally, just a few questions about you... What is your present religious preference?

- Is anyone in your household a member of a labor union?
- Are you currently registered to vote in Wisconsin?
- How much schooling did you complete?
- Are there any children, younger than eighteen years of age, living in your household at the present time?
- Are you employed full time, part time, or don't you have a paid job at the moment?
- What is your marital status? Are you married, single, widowed, divorced, or living with a partner?
- What is your zipcode?
- In what year were you born?
- What is your race or ethnic background? Are you white, black, Hispanic, or something else?
- About how much was your TOTAL FAMILY INCOME last year before taxes, was it... Less than $10,000, between $10,000-$15,000, between $15,000-$20,000, between $20,000-$30,000, between $30,000-$50,000, between $50,000-$75,000, between $75,000-$100,000, or Over $100,000

Candidate Positions
- I'm going to read you a brief series of phrases. For each, please tell me if you think it accurately describes George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither? "Has been unfairly attacking his opponent." Which one, if either does that accurately describe?
   o   "Understands the problems ordinary people face"
   o   "Can be counted on to keep campaign promises"
   o   "Has a consistent record on the issues"
   o   "Will protect the United States from terrorism"
   o   "Will improve the US economy"
   o   "Will deal well with the federal budget"
   o   "Will protect the environment"
   o   "Will make the US respected in the world"

Policy Positions
- Would you favor or oppose a law making it illegal to take someone's race into account -- either for or against them -- in making hiring decisions?
- Do you approve or disapprove of laws allowing homosexual people to marry members of their own sex?
- There is a proposed constitutional amendment in Wisconsin which defines marriage as being between one man and one woman and which bans so-called civil unions between members of the same sex. Do you favor or oppose this state constitutional amendment?
- How about an amendment that said nothing about civil unions but defined marriage as being between one man and one woman?
- Do you think the United States did the right thing in threatening war if Saddam Hussein refuses to give up any weapons of mass destruction he may have?
- Although the UN had passed many resolutions demanding that Iraq disarm, the US was not able to get a final resolution explicitly calling for war. Do you support or oppose the decision of the US and other countries to use force anyway?
- In the long run, will the US decision to attack Iraq increase the risk of terrorism in the world, reduce it, or not make that much difference one way or the other?
- Would you call the US led war in Iraq a complete success, mostly a success, only partly a success, mostly a failure, or a complete failure?

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